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AS A BRITISH ADMIRAL SAW IT

BY ADMIRAL SIR PERCY SCOTT, R. N.

I

ON the 4th of August, 1914, war was declared against Germany. I wrote to the Admiralty and offered to serve in any capacity they thought fit. I suggested that I might possibly be of use in assisting to get Director Firing into our ships, or hastily mounting heavy guns for land service. Their Lordships did not even condescend to acknowledge the receipt of my letter, so I amused myself gardening at Ascot, where I was living.

In the early stage of the war the state of our Navy as regards gunnery efficiency was deplorable, though two years had elapsed since it had been clearly demonstrated that Director Firing was the only system of firing which would give us a chance of success in action, although it was well known that the Germans had some form of Director Firing in all their ships. *When war was declared we had only ten ships fitted to fire their heavy guns by Director, and not one ship fitted, or being fitted, to fire her 6-inch guns by the same method.*

I urged the authorities to do something, but they would not move. I was informed that the First Sea Lord, H. S. H. Prince Louis of Battenberg, who was responsible to the nation for the efficiency of our Fleet in gunnery, had the matter well in hand.

On the 1st November, 1914, my old ship the *Good Hope*, in company with the *Monmouth*, *Glasgow*, and *Otranto*, engaged the German cruisers *Scharnhorst*, *Gneissau*, *Leipzig* and *Dresden* in the Pacific. After a short action the *Good Hope* and *Monmouth* were both sunk by the Germans' superior shooting. These ships were caught in bad weather, and as neither of them was fitted with any

efficient system of firing their guns in such weather, they were, as predicted in a letter I wrote to the Admiralty on 10th December, 1911, annihilated without doing any appreciable damage to the enemy.

These two ships were sacrificed because the Admiralty would not fit them with efficient means of firing their guns in a seaway. Had the system with which I had fitted the *Good Hope* been completed and retained in her, I daresay she might have seen further service and saved the gallant Cradock and his men on this occasion.

During October, after the heavy losses that our Navy had sustained, and because of the feeling of the general public that we ought not to have a foreign Prince at the head of our Navy, Prince Louis of Battenberg resigned his position as First Sea Lord on the 30th October, his place being taken by Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Fisher.

On the 3rd November, 1914, the First Lord, Mr. Winston Churchill, sent for me, and informed me that their Lordships had decided to employ me at the Admiralty on special service in connection with the gunnery of the Fleet, and I was appointed "Adviser to their Lordships on matters connected with the gunnery efficiency of the Fleet." I was further directed to investigate the question of attacking the enemy's submarines, and to put forward any suggestions that I could in that direction.

At the beginning of the War it was my opinion that we could better afford to lose a battleship than a merchant ship; but this was not the Admiralty opinion. They commandeered merchant ships in the most ruthless and reckless manner, sinking them to make breakwaters, and putting them to any use except bringing food to England. It was further proof that the Admiralty did not believe in the submarine menace; the warning I had given to them and the nation was still unheeded. It was not until the third year of the war, when four million tons of shipping had been sent to the bottom, that the Admiralty woke up and began to order the building of merchant ships, and even then their orders were so bound up with red tape that the builders could not proceed with alacrity. A shipbuilder told me that the Admiralty, in ordering, sent him so many forms to fill in that he had to tell them they could have the ships or the forms, but they could not have both.

With regard to attacking submarines, as the Admiralty

before the war had regarded them as little more than toys, it was only natural that no progress had been made in the direction of taking measures for destroying them. A Committee had certainly been considering the question for some time, but they had evolved nothing.

When I came on the scene, which was about one hundred and twenty days after war was declared, I found that they had not even taken steps to put rams on our trawlers and torpedo-boat destroyers, or to give them a weapon to attack a submarine if they happened to pass over her. The *Badger* had rammed one, but her round stem did not do enough damage to sink the submarine, and when she passed over her she had no bomb to throw down at her.

We were terribly short of fast surface craft¹—the submarine's greatest enemy—and we had no suitable depth charge to attack them with.

I had these matters put right, but it took, of course, a long time. After we had been at war a year, only a few vessels had been fitted with rams, and a quite inadequate number were supplied with depth charges.

As I had laid before their Lordships all the suggestions I could think of in regard to the destruction of submarines, I next had to turn to a much more difficult problem, namely, the gunnery of the Fleet.

I went up to Scapa Flow in the Orkneys (November 13th, 1914) and had a long interview with Sir John Jellicoe, then Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet.

The Fleet was assembled in this harbour so as to keep them as far away as possible from the German submarines. They, however, frequently saw submarines, and two or three ships had narrow escapes.

It was very gratifying to find the Fleet all cheery, drilling night and day at their guns, and doing everything possible to improve the efficiency of themselves and of their weapons. It was the weapons that I had been sent up to enquire about, and the conditions made me very anxious. Only ten ships of the whole Fleet had their main armament fitted for Director Firing, and all the work of fitting

¹ In June, 1914—that is, just before the outbreak of war—one of the guests at a dinner party asked what was the antidote for submarines. In my reply I mentioned that very fast surface boats carrying a gun would be useful. Exactly one year after that, on the 30th June, 1915, this gentleman brought me a good design of a very fast (40 knots) hydroplane motor boat 60 feet long. I took the design to the Admiralty, and they promptly turned it down. One year after this they ordered a few hydroplane 40' long motor boats. They were not of much use. A year afterwards, in April, 1917, they ordered a large number of similar boats 55 feet in length. Two years' waste of time, and we were at war!

the other ships had been suspended at the outbreak of war. Practically a hundred days had been lost, and, to make matters worse, none of the necessary electric cables and fittings had been ordered. Fitting the secondary armament with Director Firing had not been contemplated.

Such a state of things seems incredible. One would have thought that, although their Lordships paid no attention to my warning in 1911, the moment war was known to be inevitable they would have bestirred themselves and ordered all the material necessary to put the Fleet in a state of gunnery efficiency. They, however, did not wake up. They proceeded on their ordinary unbusinesslike lines of red-tape, occupying their time in letter-writing. Practically nothing had been done.

I had a conference with the First Lord (Mr. Winston Churchill) and the First Sea Lord (Lord Fisher) and pointed out to them the serious state of affairs and how badly we should fare if the German Fleet came out.¹ They realised the situation, and approved of practically all the ships being fitted with Director Firing, including vessels of the *Warrior* and *Defence* class, and some small cruisers of the *Cordelia* class. I took their approval to Sir James Marshall, the Director of Dockyard Work, and to the late Mr. Forcy, the Director of Stores; without any letter writing they acted on it at once. Drillers were sent up to the Fleet to commence the wiring, and the necessary cables and fittings were ordered. A motor car company ceased making motors and made Director instruments instead. Consequently the fitting of the ships went on rapidly, and had the push been maintained, our whole Fleet would have been equipped by the end of 1915.

In May, 1915, unfortunately for the nation, Lord Fisher left the Admiralty, and all the push ceased. I no longer had any influence; the authorities went back to their apathetic way of doing things; time, even in warfare, was not considered of any importance by them.

The result of this was that at the Battle of Jutland, fought on the 31st May, 1916, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John Jellicoe, had only six ships of his Fleet completely fitted with Director Firing—that is to say, main as well as secondary armament; he had several ships with their

¹ Fortunately for the country, the German Fleet did not come out until eighteen months afterwards.

primary armament not fitted; he had not a single cruiser in the Fleet fitted for Director Firing; he had no Zeppelins as eyes for his Fleet; and his guns were out-ranged by those of the Germans.

In one portion of the Fleet I had a very personal interest—the cruisers of the *Warrior*, *Black Prince*, and *Defence* classes. They had a mixed armament of 9.2" and 7.5" guns, and consequently were very difficult ships to fight unless they had Director Firing. Lord Fisher approved of this class of ship being fitted with Director Firing in November, 1914, but the Admiralty did not place the order until April, 1916. It was their Lordships' intention to place the order in January, 1915 (which was far too late), but the papers were mislaid, which caused a delay of three months.

The Germans in the Jutland battle sent these three ships to the bottom, and I lost my elder son, a midshipman, sixteen years of age. A week before he went into action he said to me: "Father, if we have a scrap our gunnery lieutenant says we shall not have a dog's chance, as our extemporised director which we have rigged up is not reliable, and the Germans can outrange our guns. We have only got 15° of elevation; the Germans have got 30°. They will be pumping shell into us and ours won't reach them by a couple of miles."

My midshipman son was quite correct; all our guns were outranged by the Germans. This superiority of range was conceded by our own Board of Admiralty to the German nation. In 1905 I had paid a visit to Keil, and on my return had informed the Admiralty that the Germans were giving their guns 30° of elevation. The Director of Naval Ordnance at that time, Sir John Jellicoe, was in favour of increasing our elevation, but the Director of Naval Ordnance was Director only in name. He was not a Lord of the Admiralty and had no power, so nothing was done. We continued to give our guns only 13½° of elevation. In 1907, we increased the elevation in new ships to 15°. In 1911 we increased it to 20°, and in 1915, a year after war was declared, the Admiralty did what they ought to have done ten years before, that is, they decided that in all new ships the guns should be capable of firing at 30° of elevation. Finally, in 1917, they increased the elevation in some ships to 40°.

What a curse to the nation Admiralty red-tapism was during the War! I received a letter containing a shocking example of it. At Malta there were three of our submarines eager to go out and sink the *Goeben* and *Breslau*. They were not allowed to do so because they had been sent to Malta for "Defence purposes." How could they have better defended Malta than by sinking these two ships?

On the 13th January, 1915, I was sent for by the First Lord (Mr. Winston Churchill) and he told me that H. M. S. *Queen Elizabeth* was going out to the Dardanelles, that the Navy was going to smash all the forts and go through to Constantinople, and that I could go in command.

I could not accept the offer, as I knew it was an impossible task for the inefficient ships then in the Mediterranean to perform. What was done is now a matter of history; practically everything we could do wrong we did.

For our legislators, the Dardanelles campaign will probably be the blackest page in the war's history; for our seamen and soldiers it will be one of the brightest. They landed under conditions which no other troops in the world would have faced, and displayed bravery unequalled in any other theatre of war.

II

On Wednesday, the 8th September, 1915, by the mercy of Providence, a Zeppelin came over London and dropped some bombs. I say that it was a mercy of Providence, because it showed the futility of our defence, and compelled the authorities to realize it. Two days afterwards Mr. Balfour wrote to me as follows:

ADMIRALTY, 10th September, 1915.

MY DEAR SIR PERCY SCOTT:

Will you take the Gunnery Defense of London under your charge?

1. The office can only be temporary, because in the fulness of time, the War Office must take over work which should always have been theirs.¹

2. Your *means* of defense are, I fear, at present very inadequate, but they will be improved as fast as the manufacture of new guns and the necessities of the Army and Navy permit.

I am sure you will find the work interesting, and it is certainly important. Nobody is better qualified than yourself to carry it through.

Yours,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

¹ The War Office took it over on the 16th February, 1916.

I accepted and had a look around the so-called Defence. After fourteen months of war it consisted of:

- 8 3-inch high-angle guns,
- 4 6-pounders, with gun-sights, and
- 6 Pom-poms, which would not fire up as high as a Zeppelin, and were consequently a danger only to the population.

The ammunition supplied to the guns was of the worst possible description, and was more dangerous to the population than to the Zeppelins.

In selecting the ammunition to fire at Zeppelins the authorities should have known: First, that a shell with a large bursting charge of a highly explosive nature was required so that it would damage a Zeppelin if it exploded near; second, that all that went up in the air had to come down again, and that, in order to minimise the danger to the public from falling pieces, they should have used an explosive in the shell which would break it up into small fragments.

The ammunition supplied was exactly the opposite to what we wanted. The shells had so small a bursting charge that they could do no harm to a Zeppelin, and they returned to earth almost as intact as when they were put into the guns.

Before the War, the War Office was as certain that a Zeppelin could not get to London as the Admiralty were certain that a submarine could not sink a ship. Consequently no provision was made for attacking either Zeppelins or submarines, and anyone who suggested the possibility of attacks by them was looked upon as a scaremonger.

Some time after War broke out, the citizens of London realised that the German Zeppelins could come and bomb them whenever they liked. On their behalf, the Lord Mayor of London went to the War Office and suggested that they should take some steps to keep the Zeppelins away. The War Office said that they could do nothing. The Lord Mayor then applied to the Admiralty, and their Lordships the Commissioners promised to form an Anti-Air Corps, and supply them with the necessary material to defend London.

The Army, of course, ought to have done their own work, but as the Admiralty decided to undertake it, they

should have realised the importance of their task and set about it properly. Had they done so, London, by the end of 1914, could have been defended by at least 50 guns, with serviceable ammunition; instead of which, after fourteen months of war, London was defended by 12 guns firing ammunition which did more harm to the population than to the Zeppelins.

General Gallieni, who was in charge of the defence of Paris, had to defend his 49 square miles of city; he had 215 guns and was gradually increasing this number to 300. He had plenty of men trained in night flying, and lighted-up aerodromes. I had 8 guns to defend our 700 square miles of the metropolitan area, no trained airmen, and no lighted-up aerodromes, and this notwithstanding the fact that a Cabinet Minister had told the country that when the Zeppelins came over they would be attacked by our hornets (aeroplanes).

This was the state of affairs when the Admiralty handed the colossal blunder over to me. To cheer me up, they informed me that they could not give me any more guns; that, although they had been experimenting for ten years, they had no time-fuse suitable for exploding high-explosive shell; that the only guns they had mounted on mobile mountings were Maxims, which were of no use against Zeppelins; that they had not ordered any guns for the defence of London; that they had no airmen who could fly at night, and if they had they would be of no use, as there was no ammunition suitable for attacking a Zeppelin. Practically, although the Admiralty had seriously undertaken to defend London, they had done nothing in fourteen months—or, at any rate, nothing in the right direction.

As regards the gunnery defence of London, the most criminal part of the Admiralty negligence was in the ammunition.

Nothing having been done, it was very easy to do something, and as Captain Stansfield, C. M. G., the head of the Anti-Air Department, was an efficient officer, and had under him a capable staff, we quickly got to business. Our only difficulty was to get clear of the Admiralty red-tapism.

The first thing was to find a satisfactory fuse. The Admiralty said that they had been trying for ten years to get one and had not succeeded. One of my staff, Commander

Rawlinson, C. M. G., solved the difficulty in ten minutes. The next thing was to get a design of a high explosive shell which could be quickly manufactured. This was arrived at, but now the difficulty came. Having got the designs, how were we to get the shell made? My proper course was to ask the Admiralty, but their system would allow of nothing being done quickly; the paper work would have taken at least a month to get through; the Admiralty had to be avoided. So I took the designs over to Paris, and placed the order with a motor car manufacturer, who executed the work well and quickly. In a very short time I saw my way to providing most of the guns used for the Defence of London with satisfactory time-fuses and high-explosive shells.

Admiral Vaughan Lee, C. B., of the Air Department, undertook to get lighted-up aerodromes and trained men in night flying, and Lieutenant Brock, of the R. N. A. S., quickly produced a bullet that would set a Zeppelin on fire.¹

The next thing was to get more guns. I knew that the Fleet had some they could spare, which could be converted into anti-Zeppelin guns. I applied to the Admiralty for these guns and promptly got an emphatic "No." I had anticipated this reply by writing to Sir John Jellicoe, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, and asking him for them. He promptly wired back that I could have twenty, so that quashed the Admiralty opposition.

We extracted out of the Admiralty with difficulty another fourteen guns; Lord Kitchener promptly gave me some; and with others that we picked up I found that in a short time we had increased our number from twelve to one hundred and eighteen. But, unfortunately, mountings had to be made for these, which took a considerable time.

The few guns we had for the Defence of London were mounted permanently in positions as well known to the Germans as to ourselves. We had no guns mounted on mobile carriages which could be moved about and brought into action where necessary.

The French, I knew, had some of their splendid 75 m.m. guns mounted on automobile carriages. I suggested to

¹ In 1916 our airmen and aerodromes were ready, and when the Zeppelins came over they got a very warm reception, numbers of them being brought down. The Germans lost their opportunity. For fifteen months they could have come to London as often as they liked; we were late in preparing for them—they were late in coming.

the Admiralty that they should ask the French Government either to supply or lend me one to copy. This their Lordships agreed to, and I have no doubt that in a few months they would have got the necessary papers through. However, I was determined not to work in their way. I wanted the gun, not papers, so I ordered Commander Rawlinson, a very clever officer who spoke French like a Frenchman, to go over to Paris at once and either beg, borrow, or steal a gun. I told him he was to have it on the Horse Guards Parade, under Mr. Balfour's window, in less than a week. Twenty-four hours after leaving me he wired, "Have got gun, two automobiles and ammunition."

What he did is best described in his letter to me., which was as follows:—

ADMIRALTY, 22nd September, 1915.

SIR:

In obedience to your order that I should endeavor to obtain from the French Government a 75 m/m anti-aircraft gun, mounted on an automobile, on the 16th September, I proceeded to Paris.

I first interviewed General Gallieni, who in a most courteous and charming manner pointed out that much as he would like to help London, he could not himself give me a gun, but he felt sure that General Joffre would give full consideration to anything that London wanted.

I proceeded to Chantille and saw General Pellet, the Chief of General Joffre's Staff, and without any delay a telephone message was sent to the Minister of War in Paris telling him that I could have the gun complete with two automobiles and ammunition.

The gun in my presence was tested and fired by a French crew, who also very kindly drove it to Boulogne, and shipped it to London, where it arrived on the 21st.

The whole transaction from the time of my leaving London to my return with the gun took four days.

I attach photographs of the gun and cassion.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A. RAWLINSON.

With the French gun as a guide we very soon mounted up eight of our own three-pounders on motor lorries, which gave a start to the mobile section of our defence.

Although the Admiralty did not give me any assistance as regards the Defence of London, they wanted me to comply with their unbusinesslike methods. Had I agreed to do so, it would have taken me fifteen months to get 12 guns, whereas I was aiming at getting 150 guns in six months.

So I did not agree, and wrote to Mr. Balfour as follows:

ADMIRALTY, 18th October, 1915.

DEAR MR. BALFOUR:

On the 10th September, you asked me if I would take the gunnery defense of London under my charge. I accepted, and, in doing so, considered that you intended me to procure what was necessary for the Gunnery Defense of London.

Up to last week I was led to believe that the Admiralty had ordered guns for the Defense of London.

On Friday, the 15th, you informed me that they had not done so. I at once ordered some guns. The firm with whom I placed the order wrote to the Admiralty for confirmation. The Admiralty have not confirmed the order.

If I am to be responsible for the Gunnery Defense of London, I must be allowed to do things in my own way, and not to be interfered with by the Admiralty. If the Admiralty are to settle what guns are to be used for the Defense of London, and how they are to be obtained, then they become responsible for the Gunnery Defense of London, and I resign.

If I am to remain in charge of the Gunnery Defense of London I must have a free hand to procure what is wanted how and best I can, and not to be handicapped by Admiralty red-tapism.

PERCY SCOTT,
Admiral.

Mr. Balfour kindly arranged that my work should not be hampered by the ordinary Admiralty red-tapism, so I was able to go ahead, and the Defence of London, as far as guns were concerned, advanced rapidly. But not rapidly enough, so I went over to France, to see if the French would help me again. When I told General Gallieni the number of guns we had, he laughed and expressed surprise that the Zeppelins did not come every day. After five minutes conversation, it was decided that I should have 34 of the celebrated French 75 m.m. guns and 20,000 shell with fuses complete. This brought our total up to 152.

At noon on the 16th February, 1915, the War Office took over the Gunnery Defence of London, and consequently I was no longer responsible for it.

On the following day I was asked if I would accept the post of Adviser to Field Marshal Viscount French on Air Defence questions. I accepted, so we two, who fifty years before joined the Navy side by side, were working together again.

PERCY SCOTT.